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SUBJECT: MEXICAN REACTION TO EXTRADITIONS MUTED;
RECIPROCITY EXPECTED

REF: MEXICO 00375

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Mexican reaction to the recent, unprecedented extradition of 15 wanted criminals to the U.S. has been muted. Although such massive extraditions predictably triggered isolated complaints from the opposition that the move violated Mexico's "national sovereignty," such complaints received little traction in the media. Nor have scattered opposition complaints that the extraditions failed to comply with Mexican law resonated, even if there have been calls for reciprocity or other concessions from the USG in return for the GOMs expanded law enforcement cooperation. We attribute the scant public response to the extraditions to the public's concern about insecurity and its generally strong support for Calderon's anti-crime measures. End Summary.

Muted Reaction

¶2. (SBU) Mexican reaction to the unprecedented extradition of 15 wanted criminals -- including 11 suspected drug-traffickers and 4 violent criminals -- was largely muted. Scattered criticism of the extraditions by opposition politicians received relatively little public attention, and some in the opposition even lauded the action. Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard (PRD), for example, praised the extraditions as "necessary and correct." Other opposition leaders, including PRI Senator Alejandro Moreno, have expressed their conditional support, provided the extraditions are carried out in full compliance with Mexican law. Many however, including in the PAN, are calling for reciprocity from the U.S. Some have suggested that the USG is now obligated to take actions to lower domestic drug demand or offer the GOM a generous political reward, for example, in the area of immigration reform.

A strategy to win popular support

¶3. (SBU) Although the public response to the extraditions was muted, some Mexican opposition lawmakers, such as PRD Chamber of Deputies Coordinator Javier Gonzalez Garza, have characterized the move as a "popularity booster" designed to divert Mexicans' attention away from the rising prices of staple goods. Likewise, the Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies' Justice and Security Commissions, Cesar Camacho Quiroz (PRI) and Rodrigo Medina de la Cruz (PRI),

respectively, both voiced suspicions that the extradition package was a "flashy" means of scoring points with the public.

Distraction from failures

14. (SBU) Along the same lines of criticism, some political analysts have speculated that the decision is a strategy designed to add momentum to the GOM's counter-narcotics military offensive in Michoacan, Tijuana, and Guerrero, and justify the recent expansion of the operation into Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa. They see the huge offensive as less than fully successful, having delivered relatively little in the way of arrests or drug seizures, and believe the GOM may have ordered the extraditions in order to give the impression of concrete achievements in the war on drugs.

Legal criticisms

15. (SBU) Some critics have characterized the extraditions as a policy change which may violate Mexican law and/or national sovereignty. Senators Leonel Godoy (PRD) and Alejandro Moreno Cardenas (PRI), and Federal Deputies Gerardo Vargas Landeros (PRI), Armando Barreiro Perez (PRD), and Humberto Zazueta Aguilar (PRD), all criticized the extraditions as being legally deficient. Extradition specialist Americo Delgado described the extraditions as "expulsions" in violation of the Mexican Constitution and the 1997 U.S.-Mexico extradition treaty (see reftel). Opposition legislators have summoned Secretary of Public Security Garcia Luna and Attorney General Medina Mora to testify on their actions.

Comment

16. (SBU) While we are not surprised that some in the opposition would seek to exploit every possible opportunity to score political points, we believe their scattered criticisms of the extraditions have not resonated because of the intensity of public concern about insecurity. A poll conducted by leading newspaper El Universal earlier this week indicated that 74% of the public supports Calderon's military counter-narcotics offensive. As a result, notwithstanding the opposition's muted criticisms, opposition parties have been cautious not to make too much fuss over the extraditions, for fear of being seen as defending criminal interests. In our view, the extradition package represents a deft political move from Calderon.

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